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Ram Gopal

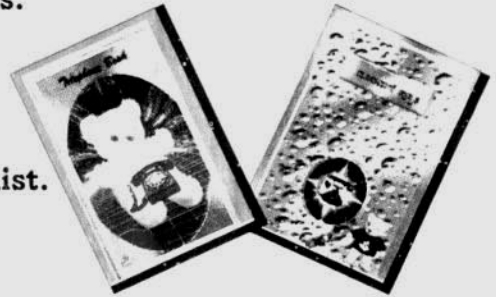


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Editor

S.N. Chandrasekhar
67, Basappa Layout
Bangalore - 560 019
Tel.: 6675758

Advisory Board

S.N. Chandrasekhar
K.C. Shivappa
S.N. Ramaprasad
H.R. Ananth

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Sound of Music

While defining music the dictionary says, "art of combining sounds for reproducing by voice, or instruments in rhythmic, melodic and harmonic forms". It further specifies "pleasant sound so produced". Yes, sound is the basic character of music. Indeed, there cannot be music without sound!

All that really made sense at a time when the loud-speaker was not known and the microphone was unheard of. Even then it was nothing unusual to find voices above the normal decibel level. Persons endowed with such voice like S.G. Kittappa, Subbaiah Bhagawatar in Tamilnadu, Bal Gandharva in Maharashtra, Sthanam Narasimha Rao in Andhra and nearer home B.S. Raja Iyengar, Kottoorappa, G. Nagesha Rao to name a few, were popular names in the theatre. Their asset was a stentorian voice which could reach the last row of seats of a huge theatre hall without the assistance of a loudspeaker.

The advent of that mechanism opened opportunities for people with feeble voices. Beamed through the loudspeaker system, there is no doubt that such voices can also sound melodious, pleasing too. Fine and rightly the technique of using the mike itself has been perfected into an art.

The time has now come when the melodic aspect of music has become a casualty. It all started with perhaps the western Pop where sound and fury are seemingly the prime concern. It is difficult to imagine a Pop event sans the ubiquitous over-size loud-speakers. It is also true that they go very well in an open-air or a large, well-ventilated auditorium where the decibel level could be inconsequential. That the idea should have inexorably infiltrated into the Indian ambience too is verily tragic. The emerging, what has come to be referred to as "Sugam Sangeeta" (light music) also seems to be overly fascinated by that kind of amplification. It is a system where the emphasis is supposed to be on the lyrics, especially those in the local language. There is no doubt that the new, emotion-filled form has breathed fresh life into Kannada poetry, as it has been in the context of the other languages too.

All that is understandable. What beats one is why the sound and fury, the decibel level so intolerably high that the effect becomes deafening, drowning the lyrics. That the same level is adhered to irrespective of the size and acoustic perceptions of the hall is what takes away the aesthetic sensibilities of the

rendition itself. Worse, the menace has not ended there. It is disturbing to find that other allied performing arts are also slowly being carried away by this revolting trend. Only the other day, an ardent connoisseur of dance was heard telling the organiser of a dance festival that though the recital on the previous evening was absorbing, he and some of his friends had to walk out, unable to withstand the high decibel in the supporting music, especially the overpowering percussion. The organiser pleaded helplessness as his pleas against abnormal amplification had received lukewarm response.

Similar is the experience of many a music or dance lover. He is left wondering why artistes have suddenly turned insensitive. As it is, the contact mike in some of our hallowed musical instruments has robbed them of their tonal timbre. Yet the craze is for raising the pitch, the artistes constantly signalling for volume.

One hears a lot being said about noise pollution. The theatre arts were free from such aberration. Is it too much to ask our artistes to respect their traditional mores?

Let's not forget that music is sound; but sound certainly is not music.

—S. N. Chandrasekhar

NRI Dancers to the Fore



Sequence in Ponniah Lalitakala Academy's Feature "Bhakti Kusumanjali"

As before, the winter this year was accompanied with a flurry of dance festivals. Significantly, quite a few of them featured NRI artistes. Kinkini in particular made it an exclusive three-day festival for State dancers who have settled down abroad. But neither Malathi Iyengar (Rangoli Dance group of USA) nor the more experienced Shakti School of Bharathanatyam of Viji Prakash could make a mark through their choreographic pieces.

Equally ambitious was the

idea of Abhinava, the cultural organisation of Nirupama & Rajendra. Here again, it was an effort to encourage NRI talent, suggestively titling the two-tiered programme as "Proshita Pratibhe", featuring Viji Prakash and her daughter Mythili in Bharathanatyam and a Kathak fare by Anjani's Kathak Dance of India, also from Los Angeles.

"Krishna Bhakti" by the former was certainly more convincing than their earlier attempt for Kinkini. The 'sancharis' in Viji's solo for

"Enna Thapam Sheydene" (Kapi) and the duet for Panchali Shapatham tellingly unfolded the many-faceted personality of Krishna to lend credibility to the concept.

The Kathak recital by Anjali Ambegaonkar and her daughter Amrapali was more like a demonstration, a lengthy sermon on the art adding to its ennui. Anjani is obviously ignorant that Kathak was introduced in the City as far back as in 1939 and that it could boast of as many exponents as herself in the style!

Nor was her presentation which was bereft of variety in both Thodas and Gats. Amrapali, like her mother, no doubt has a fine feel for laya. But in either case, it was all confined to foot-work, the 'angikas' falling short in both variety and grace. The Ghazal "Aaj Jana Nahin" had its lyrical appeal, though the artiste's Mukhija could hardly do justice to the abhinaya. More amusing was when the duo resorted to draw on an English film song to portray Ashtanayikas!

The spectrum unfolded as wide a canvas of dance activity. The pride of place in this vista perforce has to be conceded to Keshava Nrityashala, the dance school of H.R. Kwahavamurthy for which 1988-89 happens to be the golden jubilee year.



Soundarya Srivatsa

The veteran Bharathanatyam guru carved out a unique way to celebrate the event. Spread over the year, the celebration was not confined to dance recitals alone. To start with the card had a series of academic discussions *cum* demonstrations, covering the varied aspects of dance art, the emphasis naturally being on Bharathanatyam. This was followed by a workshop on Hasthas and Sthanakas. These had attracted an encouraging number of dance enthusiasts and one dare say that they all proved purposeful.

Of wider appeal was the Nrityotsava, the ten-day dance festival featuring as many as 20 dancers. Most of them were familiar faces, with

considerable stage experience too. But aesthetically one had to contend with a static presence. The only exceptions were Lakshmi Gopalaswamy and Soundarya Srivatsa. Not that they have grown in stature, but it was certainly comforting to see that they had not frittered away the gains witnessed in their earlier outings. While Lakshmi's dignified stance enriched the lyrical charm of Sumasayaka (Kapi), a flurry of wekk-knit Jathis enhanced the imagery in Soundarya's portrayal for Velane Var (Bhairavi).

Among the others, Sudhir Kumar impressed with his steady laya and neat Angikas, though the Varnam (Adi Shuvane in Thodi) offered little scope to dive deeper into Abhinaya. In her Kuchipudi fare, Preeti Prakash did not succeed in highlighting the special characteristics of the style, while Usha Datar came to her own as emphatically in her Mohini Attam pieces as in Geetopadesha, exemplifying the Kathakali technique. In either case, her lucid facials were unmistakable.

Around the same time, Ponniah Lalithakala Academy commemorated the golden jubilee of Indian Independence with a gala two-day dance festival entitled "Bhakti Kusumanjali" and "Shantaleya Kala Vaibhava". While the latter was based on the familiar verses of D.V.G. extolling the renowned Hoysala figurines, the devout outpourings of women saints

Andal, Akka and Meera provided the meat for dancerly exposition in the other.

In either case, the musical score of Tirumale Srinivas deserves special mention. The visuals in Padmini Rao's sleek choreography heightening the emotional fervour. The portrayal of fledgling dancers, particularly while depicting "Mere To Giridhara" by Urmila Doreswamy (Meera), "Schoodi Koduthal" by Mahita Nagaraj (Andal) and "Angadolage Angavagi" by Sowmya Sashidhar (Akka) vouched for their studied approach, verily overshadowing the shortcomings in the padding. M.R. Sathyanarayana's lyrics were meaningful and in rendering them Neela Ramanujam rose to emotional heights.

Ranga Praveshas:

The interregnum saw three



Anulekha Tagore

'ranga praveshas'. Though Pooja Desai (student of T.S. Bhatt), Anulekha Tagore and Rukmini Vijaykumar (both students of Padmini Rao) appeared sure of their grammar, they have yet to gain in poise and precision in line. No doubt, each has been learning the art long enough to bloom as a promising dancer, their application leaves much to be desired.

Of the trio, Rukmini was by far the more confident, an easy stance adding to her dancery potential as in the Jatiswaram (Vasanth) and the Korvais that followed in the Varnam (Dhanyasi). But her 'angikas' fell short in flexions. And her facials certainly have to gain in direction if her Abhinaya has to match her steady Nritya.

Anulekha is certainly more experienced, but seems to lack confidence. She had a rather nervous start with the



Pooja Desai



Rukmini Vijaykumar

Surya Stuthi, the same unsteady stance persisting in the Nritya numbers that followed. But her 'anga shuddham' was above board. That stood her in good stead in the disposal of the complex 'theermanams'. But her facials, in the absence of tried 'drishti' fell short in conviction.

Pooja has an attractive presence, her sound that-

tumettu testifying to a solid grounding. But her 'angikas' fall short in grace. Nor could her Abhinaya adequately cope with expounding the underlying Virahotkhadita in the popular Roopama Joochi (Thodi), the varied emotions in lines starting with 'Kopamu' and 'Tapatraya Harude' betraying a total lack of conviction.

- ATRI

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Chittoor the Giant

— S.N. Sivaswamy

Chittoor Subramanya Pillai indeed strode like a colossus among musicians in the thirty's and forty's. He was the most uncompromising purist I came across in the South those days, a stickler for form who always maintained the traditional structure of his concerts and made no adaptations in his style in order to please the public.

Without aiming to create any distinctive manner of his own, this stalwart among the musicians of the day yet drew large audiences with his powerful voice. As I recall, melody was not his forte, but he more than made up this shortcoming by the thoroughness of treatment of ragas, and the skilful neravals and swara prastharas that always enriched his recitals.

The first time I heard Chittoor in a full length concert, apart from his numerous radio recitals, was at the wedding reception of a friend of mine who was also a lover of music. It was held in a large house with a pendal set up in front for the occasion. Chittoor was in great form that day. He was accompanied by a galaxy of instrumentalists besides his (not yet famous) disciple Madurai Soma-sundaram (Madhurai Somu).

In his entourage that day, I counted atleast 8 accompanists jostling for their positions on the dais. There were two vocal accompanists. Then there were of course the Violin and Mridanga Vidwans. Then followed a whole train of percussion accompaniments like Ghatam, Kanjeera, Morsing and even Konakkol, the vocal Laya 'Vadya' which is not too familiar to present day audiences.

The tala vadya interlude (Tani) itself lasted more than half an hour, each artiste trying to demonstrate his dexterity within the time limit available to him. After their perfectly synchronised finale, it took a further five minutes for them to recover their breath and refresh themselves with coffee, tea or soda or whichever beverage they preferred.

I still remember the Raga Chittoor had chosen for the Ragam, Tanam and Pallavi. It was Kharaharapriya which he dealt with elaborately. Earlier, he had rendered 'Ammaravamma' in Kalyani equally elaborately, followed by a shorter talavadya 'Tani'. He also sang a composition in Manirangu (Ranidiradu) and ended his recital with a Tamil classic. On the whole, it was a treat for all those wedding guests who had

looked forward to a chaste and purely traditional fare.

Later, much later, I heard an open-air concert at Tiruchirapalli, featuring Madurai Somasundaram which was in stark contrast in style from Chittoor Subramanya Pillai's. Somu had taken Shanmukha-priya for detailed treatment. he was at the prime of his career, with a strong and vigorous voice and had by then cultivated a distinctive, if somewhat flamboyant style of his own. His alapana, neravals and quick swara-prastharas reminded one of a well-tuned Nagaswaram Vidwan whose manoeuvrability was beyond the scope of the average human voice. It was a masterly exposition of the raga which has remained in my memory even to this day, after many decades.

Another associate of Chittoor Subramanya Pillai who comes to my mind is Dandapani Desigar whose tamil devotionals were among the most melodious I had heard. In particular, I want to mention the soul-stirring and inimitable rendering of the operatic songs on the life of Saint Nandanar. I believe they are of unsurpassable beauty and emotional impact.

□

Ram Gopal : Showman Par Excellence



Ram Gopal

It is a truism that a svelte figure is an added advantage in dance as much as a dulcet voice is an asset to a vocalist. Exceptions, of course, can't be ruled out. The legendary

Balasaraswathi by no means could be passed off for her figure. Rather, her figure was certainly not cut out for dance. Yet her dancerly stance has had few parallels.

Likewise, the world of music has seen scores of vocalists who made a success despite what may be described as a not really pleasurable voice. As in the case of Bala, their expertise in the art was so well honed and vocalism so ingeniously adapted that each could easily establish an identity of his/her own.

The figure or the voice in such cases could be inconsequential.

Yet it can't be denied that a good voice for vocal and a proportionate figure for dance could make the task of the respective artiste that much easier. A monumental example is the incomparable Ram Gopal with his chiselled figure. What a revelation it was to sit beside him in an auditorial recently and hear dancer after dancer fore and after him, a generation telling the cult figure of Indian classical dancing, that he was their inspiration, he indeed was their ideal. One of them went to the extent of confessing that his father was such a devout admirer of him that he himself was named after him!

Yet for sure few among them could have seen the maestro dance. Indeed, Ram had bid adieu to dance much before a majority of them were born. Yes, the last time Ram

danced at any rate in Bangalore, his hometown, was around early fifties. There was a houseful show at the Opera theatre (one of the three familiar halls for dance, the other two being the Town Hall and the BRV theatre). The bill of fare in that gala performance was no different than his many others, including the first in the City that his troupe presented more than 20 years earlier, December 1939 if my memory serves me right.

The complexion of that memorable performance had remained the same. It was charivaria, a sprinkling of Bharathanatyam, Kathak, Kathakali, the Kandyam style of Sri Lanka etc., making up the meat. There were a couple of folk numbers like the Naga and Bali to boot, Ram himself having had an inkling into all these forms. He had received lessons in the different forms from such eminent gurus like Meenakshisundaram Pillai, Kattumannargudi Muthu kumaran and Conjeevaram Yellappa in Bharathanatyam, Kunju Kurup in Kathakali, Bowrilal and his son Sohanlal of Jaipur in Kathak.

In his earlier programme in 1939, soon after Ram Gopal cut his European tour and returned home on the outbreak of the World War II, many of those celebrated names including Sohanlal and Gunnayya, the Kandyam dancer besides Ram Gopal himself had figured. Nina and Bholi, familiarly known as Machaiah Sisters, were the other dancers in that star-

filled group. Later, Mrinalini Sarabhai, Tara Choudhury, the Krishna Raos, Janaki and last but not the least Leela Ramanathan had appeared on the stage along with Ram at different points of time.

The main attraction in all those outings, however, was Ram himself. Irrespective of who his partners would be, the spotlight would never waver from Ram, grace personified as it were swaying for the auspicious Alaripu flanked by Neena and Bholi or Neena and Mrinalini or Tara, Janaki, Leela as the case may be. His meticulously measured 'Attami' and the faultless 'anga shuddham', enriched by supple 'angikas' and steady 'are mandi' would lend a dignified presence to that opening number, which alas has been nowadays replaced by a flashy Pushpanjali. The turn out of the other two, mostly trained by Ram himself, would be equally tidy and elegant, though beside the magnetic

presence of Ram they would fade into insignificance.

However, that traditional invocatory gave an indication of a colourful saga that was in store in the gala evening. What followed was not much varied, though unfailingly captivating for its rich tapestry. The same arrangement would prevail in the crisp Jatiswaram, punctuated with alluring 'sthanakas'. But it was in the solos for the 'Keertanas', either the multi-hued Natanaadinaar (Vasanta) or the sequence-filled Thaye Yeshoda (Thodi) that really highlighted the depth of Ram's eloquent facials, so variegated, so meaningful and so mesmerising in their impact. His flexions would be as spontaneous, casting a spell on the lay and literati alike.

True, the repertoire was commonplace, including the Kathak number where more than any complex 'thodas', an

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Kalanidhi Narayan Greeting Ram Gopal

array of flowing 'gats' would lend credibility to the form. Ram enjoyed the portrayal for the 'Shabdham', usually the fascinating 'Sarasijakshulu' (Kambodi). The way he juxtaposed the divergent roles of Krishna and the Gopis, his hapless victims, was a real treat, worth going miles to experience.

His folk numbers, a Cobra dance of the Nagas and the Balinese dance (of an Indian Ocean island) would add variety to the fare. But the piece de resistance was the 'Sandhya Nrithya' (Dance of the Setting Sun). Ram resplendant in his minimal 'aaharya', trite trunk and a gorgeous 'mukut', glittering in golden hue. The choreography itself was simple, drawing more on a variety of stances than much of bhavabhinaya. His very presence was enough to carry conviction. As enchanting was

his Garuda (The golden eagle). Here again, the portrayal would stand out for its distinct costume, a characteristic beak and a pair of frond-like wings covering his extended arms, accounting for a grand spectacle. The gay abandon in which he leapt and hopped around had an eye-filling effect, leaving a lasting impact on the viewer. The finale was reserved to "Gowri Nayaka," the lilting Kanada Thillana.

That in a nut shell is Ram Gopal and his art. No doubt, there is not much of depth in the repertoire as it is conceived today. The hallowed Varnam rarely found a place in the dispensation, though alluring numbers like a "Sariga Kongu" or a "Therivil Varandi" did provide spice to the aspect of Abhinaya. Yet the bill did fall short of wholesomeness. What made

the difference was Ram's magnetic presence, the elegance in his stance, the sensitive touch in his 'drishti' and above all his total involvement, all of which would create an inescapable rapport. Indeed here was a showman par excellence. No wonder, lay viewers, the cognescenti as well as the critics the world over saw a Nijinski in him. What can be more rewarding for an artiste!"

Ram's fellow artistes were as impactful in their portrayal. Sohanlal invariably vied with his compeer for top honours. His solo numbers like Prabhat, Kaliyamardana and the mystifying Vayu were rated very high for their rhythmic excellence and aesthetic fervour. Gunnayya's Kandyana dance, so akin to Kathakali in its rustic overtones, would be as enjoyable.

On a short visit to the City from England where he has settled down, Ram who is well past 80, today appears care worn with not all his faculties in tact. His talk is incoherent, though his hearing and sight are not impaired. But his yearning for dance persists. And that is how he managed to attend the gala Sharad Vaibhava of the Prasiddha Foundation, sitting through the long hours, perhaps his nostalgic memories taking him back to the halcyon days when he himself was on the stage!

Essence

Shift in Status

—Manu Iyengar

For once, the minds of people in the film industry are ticking. People have been made to think instead of just mindless gyrations.

This temporary phase has ensured our hon'ble minister for Information and Broadcasting, Ms. Sushma Swaraj bestowing an official "industry, status" on the film world.

Filmi log who have been fighting for this privilege for years, now have paused to find out what this actually means. Institutional finance, I suppose, as opposed to depending on shifty-eyed under world dons, sensible working hours, minimum wage, labour regulations, social security, means of legal recourse, etc. Will all this bring with it a greater degree of professionalism?

We, in the dance and music field must sit up and take notice. The government machinery has always shared a love-hate relationship with the cultural field. We cannot bear their interference, but we are unable to manage without their aid. We complain about whom they choose to project, and crave their indulgence for a while, and if we happen to get a moment's mercy, we complain about restrictions and squirm out of the ensuing responsibilities.

Many of the institutions receiving grants from the HRD Ministry for maiden ventures/productions, lose their credibility by misusing the funds. More taxpayers money. Therefore, the dust. The government and the cultural field, shall, at best be indifferent bed fellows.

The corporate houses beguile musicians and dancers with mega-bucks. But there is proposition that is unfaithful it's there at times and unavailable at most. Sports and popular cultural events are more worth their while, bringing national exposure and access to younger generations. So, the flirtation between the arts and the corporates continue, no long-standing commitment can be achieved.

This, then, lands us squarely on the government's doorstep. They have the money the wherewithal and the social obligation to patronize the arts. But what must we, as artistes give them back for their efforts? Do we continue to print a single invitation as proof of the usage of government grants, and fill our greedy pockets, or do we use the patronage to further the cause of the art, giving it the full reach of creativity and energy, to come up with a production which adds to our cultural heritage?

Because of a few law-breakers the credit of the artistic community is at stake. Let's try to further the cause of the field, rather than erode the pillars that are trying to strengthen its structure. Let's brave the regulations, restrictions and structures, because, without them there will be corruption and mayhem. Let's be professional in our approach, and put it an honest day's work to make us worthy of the anticipated reward. So what if Pt. Briju Maharaj has to retire from the Kathak Kendra at the age of 60 years. He is now a living legend, thanks in no small measure to the years of support secured from a government institution!

□

Bhavyalakshmi, B.

Bhavyalakshmi, the KALATILAKAM of 1993 Kerala State Schools Youth Festival, I Prize winner in violin at National level in the All India Radio Music Competitions, I RANK holder of Calicut University in B.A. (Music) of 1998 and, now a student of M.A. (Music) of Mysore University has been awarded a scholarship for higher studies in Carnatic classical music by the Department of Culture under the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, New Delhi.

She is the daughter of Sri N. Babu, Former Deputy Registrar of Co-operative Department, Govt. of Kerala, and Smt. C.V. Lalitha, Teacher, Government of Ganapat Boys High School of Calicut.

FAC

Karnataka Artistes in Chennai Music Festival



Hyderabad Sisters, Dr. Jyotsna, V. Krishna

Madras, now renamed as Chennai, is known for its Music Festival Season during December. This year there was a surfeit of music programmes organised by around 45 organisations covering nearly 1770 concerts, exclusive of Harikatha and Dance recitals.

About 51 Artistes from Karnataka were featured this year. The 12 vocalists included M.S. Sheela, Rudrapatnam Brothers, V. Kalavathy, Hamsini Nagendra, Saralaya Sisters, Seethalakshmi Venkatesan, Padma Gurudatt, R.A. Ramamani, Dr. R.N. Srilatha, V.N. Padmini, T.V. Ramprasad. Dr. Padma Murthy and Bangalore K. Venkataram were featured in Academic demonstrations at the Music Academy and the Indian Fine Arts Society. Five Veena recitals included R.K. Suryanarayana, Shanthi Rao, Dr. Suma Sudheendra, D. Balakrishna

and Pushpa Kashinath. Two Saxophone recitals were by Kadri Gopalanath and Mangalore Anantharam. Bangalore M. Kodanda Ram provided a Nagaswara recital.

Accompanists included 12 violinists — Mysore M. Nagaraj, Dr. Mysore M. Manjunath, H.K. Venkataram, Dr. Jyothsna, Nalina Mohan, B.U. Ganesh Prasad, Kanchana Subba Rathnam, S.V. Narayan, T.G. Thyagarajan, Balu Raghuram, Lalgudi Rajalakshmi and R. Raghuram. Mridangam Artistes were M.T. Rajeshari, V. Praveen, Arjun Kumar, A.V. Anand, Anur Ananthakrishna Sharma, V. Krishna, T.A.S. Mani, H.S. Sudhindra, Mysore Sudarshan. Kanjira Artistes were B.S. Purushotham (now settled in Chennai), H.P. Ramachar, B.R. Latha and Prashanth. Ghatam accompanists were

Bangalore K. Venkataram, H. Shivarama-krishnan and Sukanya Rama-gopal. B. Rajashekhar and G. Omkar played morsing.

Most number of programmes were provided by Kadri Gopalanath on Saxophone, Mysore Nagaraj and Manjunath on Violin, B.S. Purushotham on Kanjira and B. Rajashekhar on Morsing.

A demonstration on "Lesser known Mysore Composers" by Bangalore V. Kalavathy was a special attraction. Bangalore K. Venkataram provided explanation notes accompanied by Lalgudi Rajalakshmi on Violin and H.S. Sudhindra on Mridangam at the Indian Fine Arts Society. It was presided over by veteran Mridangam Maestro Vellor Ramabhadran.



Pushpa Kashinath T.



V. Kalavathy, Hamsini, V. Krishna

(A report on the interesting lec-dem will be carried in our next issue. Ed.)

As usual, senior vainika R.K. Suryanarayana at the Indian Fine Arts Society attracted a sizeable audience. While this Nalinakanti focussed on a composition of his own, the detailed airing for Shanmukhapriya for an even-paced Mariveredikkevarustood out for its modal grandeur. Pushpa Kashinath was the other vainika who impressed by her facile rendition. Her concert for the TVG's Academy of Fine Arts stood out for its melodic charm, Karnaranjin (Vanchi-toname) and Kalyani (Himadrisuthe) vouching for her steady progress in the art.

The series itself was

inaugurated with the vocal recital by Vidyabhushana, one of the most popular disciples of T.V.G. His singing had an irresistible appeal, the devout fervour enriching the lyrical richness of the compositions. Saralaya Sisters (Kavitha and Triveni) at the Kapali Fine Arts proved as impressive in their vocalism.

Shanmukhapriya (Marivere) was the main attraction, the rendition invested with expansive swara passages.

The Madras Music Academy President was Nagaswara Veteran Sheik Chinna-Moulana. Birth Centenaries of Nagaswara Rajarathnam Pillai, Violin Kumbakolam Rajamanikyam Pillai, Flute I.N. Swaminatha Pillai and Vocalist Chittoor Subramanya Pillai were part of the celebration this year. A book containing their biographies was released.

N. Rajagopalan of 'Carnatic Classics' adds; V. Kalavathy in her concert for the Music Academy was an image of confidence, composure and assurance. Delineation of Sankarabharanam with 'Enduku Peddala' was heartening, presenting the melodic finesse of the raga excellently. 'Sri Matrubhutam' and 'Seshachala' were very well presented. There was a good presence of audience too.

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A Rare Musical Genius — II

— E.P. Alamelu

The Acharya was well-versed in playing the veena too. Once during visit to Tillai near Tanjore, he was invited to play the veena at a function. Famed vocalists like Muthaiah Bhagawatar and others were to present concerts after him. Krishnamachar's veena recital was so exciting that all the other vidwans, including Muthaiah Bhagawatar desired that it should continue even after the stipulated time. The concert went on for nine hours, rendering the rapt listeners spellbound. They were all so pleased that they did not mind missing their own turn. Such was the impact Krishnamachar had created.

But fate was unrelenting. The very next day his little finger became stiff and he felt depressed. To add to the agony, his wife and only son expired suddenly. His legs also got affected, making him totally immobile. Forlorn, he returned to Bangalore and settled down in a choultry, losing all interest in life. That was in 1929. But soon people recognised him and persuaded him to start a shool for music. Eventurally, in 1931 he set up the Arya Gana Vidyalaya.

The same year, Smt. Rukmini Devi Arundale, Founder of Kalakshetra Chennai invited him to her dance academy and induced him to



G. Channamma, the best-known disciple of 'Puliyogara' Krishnamachar

score music for 'Kutrala Kuravanji' which became one of her hit productions. The Acharya stayed there for some years before returning to the city in 1940. By that time he had become conversant with Tamil, Telugu, Sanskrit, Kannada and Malayalam. Besides he was proficient in Ayurveda and Jyotishya Shastras too. More than all that, he was recognised as an authority on the theory and practice of music.

Krishnamachar and his brothers who were called 'Kaladipettai Brothers' combined together to produce musical gems like Gana-bhaskara, Thyagaraja Hridaya and Sangeetha Sudambhudi. Krishnamachar himself was entrusted with the task of setting notation for the songs in those publications.

By that time his Aryagana Vidyalaya had become a full fledged institution and the

Acharya used to handle classes on all days except Saturdays which were reserved for his prayers. Exception was only when he had to take advanced students.

On one particular Saturday, a student who came to the Vidyalaya was surprised to find the doors closed. The cook was also not to be found. But there was a shrill sound coming out of the house which indicated that someone was down with excruciating pain. When the door was forced open, it was found that the Acharya was lying down with tears in his eyes and singing a Devara-nama, 'Yaariddarenu Yenage Neenalladevemanna'. He was running high temperature and did not appear fully conscious. Yet the words were coming out spontaneously.

Some students who had gathered by then immediately attended to him, one of them nothing down the words and the notation. Tiger was at once summoned and he came to see his brother in agony and lamented exclaiming, "You are really a genius. Till now nobody had mastered my style of singing. But you have so many talented students. Your Janjhooti kriti has thrilled me because of its telling 'raga bhava'. You are really a 'mahanubhava', your thoughts and mind being divine and your singing soft and appealing. I myself am not endowed with any of these qualities. I don't understand why God is not showing mercy on such a 'bhaktha'. Oh God! I

am an ordinary mortal to understand your leelas”.

With tears in his eyes, the Acharya pleaded to his elder brother to give him poison and end his life. That would be of immense help to a suffering brother. Tiger was shocked at his words. He consoled his brother saying, “Don’t despire, You are so pure in heart that you will not have rebirth.” He attained the lotus feet of Sri Rama in 1948, putting an end to all his trials and tribulations. He was 65 then.

Krishnamacharya has composed several kritis in rare ragas. We are fortunate that Sangeetha Kala Ratna G. Chennamma, one of his foremost disciples, has collected

all of them and published in her “Gana Vidya Pradeepika”, to keep his memory alive. Some of the Tamil kritis the Acharya composed at Chidambaram have the ‘Anikita’ Thillai Nataraja (1941), while his other ‘Ankitas’ include Padmapuri Varada, Vasantha Purusha, Ranga, Tiru Vengada, Varada, Vemanna and Panduranga. He and his brothers together have composed some kritis with Thyagaraja as ‘Ankita’. Natajanaparipalaka, Needucharanamulein Simhendrama dhyama Vinatha Sutha in Harikambodhi, Gajanana in Thodi are some of them.

Scholars have described his music as “Purusha Mohini”. Acharya was gifted

with a striking ‘Shareera’ which blended with subtle ‘gamakas’ with clear and perfect intonation. Though beset with so many ailments, he used to sing with ease and a smiling countenance.

His kritis are all ‘Atma Nivedana’ with an Adhyatma flavour, revealing the influence of Thyagaraja in them. He was also a staunch follower of Mahatma Gandhi, addicted to Khadi. His composition “Gandhi Mahatmulu” emphasises Gandhiji’s doctrines of Ahimsa and the greatness of Charaka. Indeed, Karnataka is fortunate that such an emite genius lived in the State serving the cause of music till his very end!

Flute Maestro Remembered



The birth centenary of Flute Maestro H. Narasinga Rao (13.12.1936 - 8.11.1998) was celebrated by the Percussive Arts Centre under the joint auspices of the Gokhale Institute of Public Affairs on November 15. Veteran Vidwan M.R.

Doraiswamy, the seniormost disciple of Rao presided and recalled the sweet memories of his Guru, his teaching methods and his great human values.

Group by youngsters of ‘Nada Bindu’ rendered a Krithi in Kunthalavarali of Narasinga Rao as invocation, directed by a senior flutist Dwaraky Krishnaswamy.

Bangalore K. Venkataram, Director of the Art Centre in his welcome address referred to Narasinga Rao as the guru of B. Shivaramaiah who initiated Flute B.N. Suresh into the instrumental techniques resembling those of Flute Mali. In fact, it was flute Mali himself, who clarified that one Narasinga Rao had

developed techniques similar to his own which Shivaramaiah had been taught and passed on to Flute Suresh.

M.S. Srinivasa Murthy, a ‘Prasishya’ of Narasinga Rao (Sishya of M.R. Doraiswamy) gave a flute recital with Kumari Ashwini accompanied by Ulsoor S. Chandrashekar, Ullur Nagendra Udupa and Ravishankara Sharma on Violin, Mridanga and Ghata respectively.

V. Kalavathy compered the proceedings. The sister and family of Narasinga Rao have come forward to assist the publication of his composition. These have been collected by Vidushi Padma Gurudutt, under her task of collection of “Compositions of Mysore Composers”.

Kelucharan Excels in 'Sharad Vaibhava'



Veterans all : Kelucharan Mohapatra M.K. Saroja and Vedantam Satyanarayana Sharma

Sharad Vaibhava, the Annual dance extravaganza has earned an enviable reputation as a major event in the country's theatre agenda. The two-day festival of dance duets and a colloquium of 1998 was in keeping with the high standards of its promoter, the Prasiddha Foundation. The thronging response despite the remoteness of the venue (the Tata Auditorium) itself was proof of the esteem in which this organisation of Pratibha Prahallad enjoys among the connoisseurs.

Though the colloquium itself had a limited appeal, the evening recitals provided endless exciting moments, as much to the expectant viewers many of whom had to be content with close-circuit TVs, including a large screen, to get a feel of the programme as the dancers themselves.

Jugalbandi, as a concept in the musical parlance can hardly be described as the ideal means for aesthetic enjoyment. But in dance it was evident that

the demand for compromise is not as disconcerting. The Bharathanatyam-Kathak duet which set the festival in motion proved the point. Pratibha Prahallad and Shovana Narayan, exemplifying the two distinct styles respectively, jelled so convincingly and so imaginatively that it had an indelible impact, the sleek Nritta forays especially unfolding any number of creative possibilities without sacrificing the identity of each.

The Odissi-Kathakali pair of Sonal Mansingh and Sadanam Balakrishna was certainly not as engrossing, the duo not succeeding in striking a balance at any time during the longish proceedings, covering almost



Pratibha Prahallad and Shovana Narayan telling Bharathanatyam with Kathak

the entire gamut of Jaya-deva's Ashtapadis. It has also to be conceded that there were more dissimilarities between the two styles than the earlier combination of Bharathanatyam and Kathak.

The ultimate in the concept, however, was reached when M.K. Saroja, Vedantam Sathyanarayana Sharma and the irresistible Kelucharan Mahapatra came together. The artiste who really forged a sense of unity in the presentation was the Odissi stalwart. He verily inveigled his Bharathanatyam and Kuchipudi compeers into the

contrived scheme. Indeed, the dancery potential of the familiar sloka Kasturi Thilakam could not have been exploited more exhaustively, more convincingly and with greater aesthetic revelry by any other dancer in living memory!

Though by no means less earnest, neither the Kuchipudi veteran nor the famed Bharathanatyam exponent of yester years could match Kelucharan's exuberance in the exposition, exfoliating as he did almost every phrase in myriad hues. It was a real treat.

As exhilarating was the emotional outburst as the Odissi virtuoso's interpretation for Pashya ti Dishishish, one of the most fascinating Ashtapadis from the immortal Geetagovinda of Jayadeva. Though the underlying Nayika is Vipralabha, Kelucharan in his lucid presentation invoked several other Nayikas including Abhisarika, Virahotkhandita and Vasikasajja. Indeed, his mastery over the dance idiom is complete.

S.N.C.

Interesting Fare in "Nrityanjali"



Uma Rao in 'Ganamurthe'

"Sangeeta Trimurti Namana", a dance feature on the redoubtable Trinity of Carnatic Music (Thyagaraja, Shyama Sastry and Dikshitar) set the ball rolling for the annual Geetanjali Dance-Drama festival of the Sri Lalitakala Academy, Mysore, in November last.

The choreography for this audio-visual treat, based on the immortal compositions of

the 18th century saint-singers was by Uma Rao, the Director of the Academy. Well-known compositions like Jagadananda Karaka (Nata of Thyagaraja), Kamakshi (Bhairavi of Shyama Sastry) and Srirangapura Vihara (Brindavana-Sarangam Muthuswami Dikshitar) were depicted by a team of well-trained youthful dancers with Chetan Hebbar and Seema stealing the show in stellar roles. The sensitive feel in Uma Rao's 'ekahara' for Ganamurthe (Thyagaraja) added to the classical milieu. Another Thyagaraja classic Seetha Kalyana Vaibhogame (Kuranji) provided a fitting finale to the enjoyable fare in which Radha Thandaveswar's vocal refrain was a high spot.

The three-day festival included "Sneha", a Bharatha-

natyam ballet by Chitra Visveswaran of Madras and "Pashupatham", a Kuchipudi dance-drama by Dr. Venkateswara Rao of Hyderabad.

Chitra's Sneha was a thought-provoking innovation where she uses the Bharathanatyam technique to portray epic characters like Sibi, Dadhichi and Karna and contrasts them with the prevailing human tendencies. Though not using the traditional Bharathanatyam costume, the nuances in the Nritya and Abhinaya were so effective that the narrative could make an indelible impact.

The Kuchipudi piece by Nritya Darpana of Dr. Rao could not live upto expectation, the young dancers save Dr. Rao himself in the role of Shiva, appearing rather amateurish. His Thandava was the saving grace in the entire choreography.

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Seethalakshmi : Decades in Musical Harmony



Seethalakshmi Venkatesan

Seethalakshmi Venkatesan is a name familiar with rasikas of Karnataka. Lovingly called Mami in close circles, she is a paragon when it comes to Carnatic classical music. Completing nearly seven decades in musical harmony, Seethalakshmi Venkatesan (aged 72) has come a long way.

A regular performer of the AIR, which has recognised her as an A-grade artiste and at Door Darshan which has invited her for special features, Mami is known and appreciated for her deft rendering of ragas. She has also earned fame as a melodious singer of devotional music, which is due to her training in Hindustani music under the

late Pandit Ramarao V. Naik. Her rendition of bhajans is glorifying. She is regularly featured in several music festivals too.

Mami's career has been studded with notable milestones, having been the recipient of several awards and titles such as 'Gana Saraswati' (1970), 'Ganakala Paripurne' (1983), 'Kalajyothi' (1992), 'Nadajyothi' (1993) and the coveted Sangeetha Ratna Mysore T. Chowdiah memorial state award for 1994-95 as well as the honours of Ganakala Parishad (1988) and Bangalore Gayana Samaja in 1994. Her latest, one of the most prestigious award, the Sangeeta Nrithya Academy award for 1998-99, which honoured her with the

— Shruti Nanavaty

title 'Karnataka Kalashri', was awarded recently.

With an awe-inspiring life as hers, one is left wondering how this stalwart achieved it all. That and other related queries are answered in an interview that follows: Excerpts from an interview: -

Hearty congratulations Mami! How do you feel on receiving the Sangeetha Nritya Academy award?

I feel indeed proud and happy that Karnataka has honoured me so beautifully. I truly feel that I have achieved something in my musical career by getting this award.

Could you give a brief family background and when and how you began your musical journey?

I am originally from Kerala and was born there. My parents were lovers of music. But I got the taste of music from my paternal side. My father felt that I had the potential to become a musician. At the age of five, I started my training as a violinist. But soon my parents realised that I had a melodious voice, and put me on vocal. I've had the opportunity to learn under Vaidyanatha Bhagavatar, my first guru K.S. Narayana-swamy, my father's nephew and a famous vainika. I made

my concert debut at the age of ten which earned me encouraging appreciation. Thereafter, on my marriage to Venkatesan in 1940, we shifted to Tanjore. For five years I trained under Sri Tanjore Sankaran, a reputed musician and composer. My husband then got a transfer to Madras where I continued my music lessons under the loving and able guidance of Sangeeta Kalanidhi Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer. Here I was fortunate to learn music in a Gurukula system.

Why did you opt for a musical career? Who or what inspired and encouraged you to pursue it?

Since I didn't have the responsibility of rearing children, I thought I could devote myself to music. My husband played a vital role in my musical journey. He encouraged me to such an extent that he would forego anything for music and always accompanied me to all my concerts. His critical comments helped me to improve my music.

In the course of your pursuit for music, did you find any event of interest that occurred?

When I was young people used to say I had a beautiful voice. Whenever I practiced music, passers-by would crowd outside my house and listen. They were under the impression that a M.S. Subbalakshmi record was being played!!

Another event that always brings a pleasant memory to my mind is that with M.S. Once when I performed at Tamil Isai Sangam-Madras, M.S. was present. She praised and blessed me and said: "You will become a good musician". I felt on top the world then.

Who were your contemporaries?

R. Vedavalli, Mani Krishnaswamy... Seeta Rajan... Suguna all were with me. We used to sing as a group in musical operas when I was in Chennai.

How do you react to budding artistes of today? What are the important points in making them good artistes?

I feel that today everything, even music is in a rush. Students want a platform within 2-3 years of musical training. In our times we used to learn one Keertana a month. Our gurus would refuse to go ahead till we had mastered it, by repeating after the guru. There was nothing like notation in those days.

The artistes of today require to put more bhava and bhakti in their music. It has become more commercialised instead, where the Niravel and Swaras are rendered mechanically. Swara is actually supposed to be sung in Sarvalaghu pattern, but today mathematics dominate resulting in lack of bhava and gamakas in swaras. Their

presentation should be more neat and they should know the meaning of each keertana they sing. I feel there should be more Vilamba kala keertanas learnt.

However, there are many singers who are good. They must keep up the standard.

What is in the world between music and you?

Music is divine. I feel blessed when I sing. When we sing we are brought closer to God. To me music is everything. It is an obsession. The joy that I experience is beyond comprehension. I cannot think of myself without music. It keeps me healthy and engaged too.

Apart from music, what else keeps you healthy and occupied?

I enjoy reading books, gardening and have a zest for cooking delicacies.

A parting question. What do you want to be remembered as?

I want to be remembered as a good musician, a good teacher and of course a good human being.

An ardent devotee of all Gods, Mami is an ocean of love and devotion. She is affectionate and benign towards her students. She is among those few worshippers of music who have kept up the image of classical music in its pristine and chaste form and believes in preserving it.

□

Scholarly 'Raga Darshini' in Navavarana Kritis

—Kusuma Rao



R.R. Keshavamurthy

The Ragadarshini by violin maestro R.R. Keshava Murthy for Sri Tyagaraja Gana Sabha in October last was a veritable feast for music lovers. He was accompanied by C. Cheluvarej on Mridangam and Bangalore K. Venkataram on Ghatam.

Punctual, methodical, disciplined—are some expressions that spring to mind while one talks of the youthful octogenarian. Indeed, his mien belies his years. No wonder the seasoned veteran is held in high regard in

music circles. His disciples are many, some having attained name and fame the world over.

The redoubtable R.R.K. is a masterly performing artiste as well as a competent Guru. I had heard him twenty years ago at a concert and today he is as energetic, clear and precise in his bow-wielding. Age has not withered him, nor custom stale his infinite variety. He stressed the importance of constant Saadhana—'daily practice' in common parlance.

His Raagadarshini comprising Dikshitar's Navavarana Kritis was simply fascinating. The two hours passed off too soon. With old-world courtesy he asked the artistes flanking him if it was not tedious for them—playing—stopping—playing, intermitently. Good-humouredly, he promised a 'long taniavartanam', at the end of the session.

R.R.K. took up sets of Janya-ragas born of the same Janaka raga, which share similar swaras, but have distinctive characteristics of their own—for the exposition. Eg.: Kannada-Neelambavi, Thodi-Dhanyasi, Shahana-Dwijavanti, Sourashtra Chakravaka, Reetigowla-Ananda Bhairavi, Bhairavi-Ghanto, Suruti-Kedaragowla, Aahiri-Nata Bhyravi, Thodi-Punnagavaralan and Mayamalava gowla-Nadanamakriya.

He illustrated the common features vocally and demonstrated the fine points of differentiation by playing, and thus brought out the nuances of the raagas. It was a scholarly exposition, interspersed with interesting anecdotes and laced with good humour.

Some ragas, the maestro said, have a sort of stigma attached to them, having had unpleasant associations. For example, 'Suruti' is called 'Sottabaayi'. It is said the person who sings this

ragawill have to go hungry, or with an empty stomach. One day, a musician wanted to test or disprove this theory. He went deep into the woods, taking his 'butthi' (lunch packet) with him. He sat on a stone near a river, after hanging his lunch basket on a convenient natural peg nearby - a bamboo shoot in a bamboo grove, to keep it safe from wild animals. He sang Raga Suruti for hours single-mindedly, with no problem like scoffing at his ignorance of superstitious people who had tried to stop him from singing this beautiful raga. He felt he had at last silenced them.

He at last went to get his lunch. Alas! it had disappeared. Flabbergast, he looked here and there. It was nowhere to be seen. Plainly bewildered, he sat down and looked up to the heavens in sheer wonder. Lo and behold! There it was, his lunch basket, up in the sky, beyond his reach. While he was singing, the bamboo was growing, as bamboos do in the sun and took the packet along up too! And there was just no way of retrieving the basket because you cannot climb a bamboo pole. He had no choice but to go hungry. Thus the soubriquet for Suruti came to be 'Sottabaayi'.

A story about *Purvikalyani*: Muthuswami Dikshitar is reputed to have sung his swan-song 'Meenaxi Me Mudam dehi' in this raga. They say he breathed his last, with *Purvikalyani* raga on his lips. For this reason some

musicians avoid singing this raga, probably fearing the worst.

'Giripai' in Sahana is said to have been composed by Tyagaraja, just before his departure from this world. Aahiri and Punnagavarali also have similar inauspicious associations.

However, RRK assured his listeners that he was free from reservations of that sort and to prove his point, he played Tyagaraja's Sahana

piece and so beautifully.

He began his lec-dem with a solemn and reposeful alaap in *Sourashtra*. He showed how the 'Rishabha' should be played or sung even lower than Suddha Rishabha in order to be authentic. If the 'Ri' note can be held on the violin in the space of, say, one centimetre, the *Sourashtra* 'Ri' comes at the lower end. He made one physically see this, tear it and distinguish it from the Suddha 'Ri' of the wrong frequency.

Wales welcomes Indian Ballet



Two local dancers Hank Sanjay and Praveen in a ballet in Cardiff

The well-known Bharatha-natyam guru and choreographer Padmini Rama-chandran's ballet on "Kalighat Icons" for the India Dance of Kiran Ratna of Cardiff proved an instant success in Wales. The ballet was presented in seven centres of Wales, including one at Manchester during Padmini's two-month tour of that country (October-November).

Besides directing the ballet, Padmini also conducted workshops on Bharathanatyam Kiran, the sponsor who is herself an Indian classical dancer, runs classes in Dance, Story-telling and Batik in her institution in Cardiff.

In her tour, Padmini was accompanied by young Praveen and Sanjay Shantaram, both as dancers and assisting her in the workshops.

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This is how a lec-dem ought to be conducted. He played 'Suryamurthe' in full. It is set in a difficult tala Dhruva tala (3 dhruta + 1 laghu) a tricky tala not easily mastered. One must tread carefully or it just may not sound like *Sourashtra* at all.

In contrast, *Chakravaka* was a straightforward raga, easy to play or sing and one is not likely to go wrong in it, illustrating it with 'Etula Brotuvo' in part.

Contrasting *Reetigowla* and *Anandabhairavi* - both janyas of *Natabairavi*, the maestro pointed out how the *Sadharana Gandhara* should be held (sung or played) a little high, giving it its full value as it were, to make it truly authentic. *Reetigowla* has been heard hundreds of times, but it was illuminating to see and learn just what it was that made it *Reetigowla* - pure and unalloyed. Making a comparative study of *Anandabhairavi*, which the veteran classified as a 'Triswara Bhashanga' raga - as *Gandhara*, *Dhaivata* and *Nishada* of both kinds occur in *Anandabhairavi* to make it so complex, pleasant and popular. Though *Antara Gandhara*, *Suddha Dhaivata* and *Kakali Nishada* prayogas are few and far between, their rare occurrence adds a special touch to it. With just *Sadharana Ga*, *Chatussshruti Dha* and *Kaishiki Ni* - it would be just another raga-janya of *Khara-harapriya*! The *Sadharana Gandhara* of *Anandabhairavi* is softer (than that of

Reetigowla).

Next, he took up *Ghanta* - a rarely heard raga-janya of *Natabhairavi* and pointed out its similarities to *Bhairavi*. The notes *Ri*, *Ga*, *Ma*, *Dha*, *Ni* are common to both the *Shadava* ragas. In *Ghanta* the notes are sounded straight, plain and neat - although elongated - without much 'gamaka'. Eg:- *Ma Nee Da Pa, Sa Ni Daaa Pa Ma Gaaa Ri, Ni Gaaa Ri, Ga Ma Daaa Pa, Ma Gaaari, Nee Da Daaa Pa, Ma Gaaa Rii, Ni Rii* (suddha) *Sa*.

Also, *Ghanta* boasts of an extra *Suddha Rishabha* in the *Avarohana*. *RRK* played *Ghanta* and the eighth *Navavarana Kriti* of *Dikshitar* - 'Sri Kamalambike' in full, highlighting the characteristic features of the raga and contrasting it with *Bhairavi*. Speaking of the legendary *Bhairavi* the veteran said the raga is full of 'gamakas' and one cannot say too much about its *Dhaivata* or *Gandhara*. The raga has held listeners in thrall for ages. One has just to sound the single note 'Ri' and the audience clucks in appreciation, anticipating further delights. *Bhairavi* is too much sung and played, used and exploited raga. *RRK* just touched in passing, the fifth *Navavarana Kriti* Sri *Kamalambikayaha* set in *Misra Jhampe* tala.

He took up *Aahiri* - a janya of *Natabhairavi* and a raga with great possibilities, comprising all the twelve or sixteen swaras. He played the

Navavarana Kriti Sri *Kamalamba Jayathi* in full. *Suruti* and *Kedaragowla* were the next set of janya ragas of 28th *Harikhambhoji*, that he explored. The characteristic 'Ma' and 'Ni' of *Suruti* are to be held a little high. In *Maa Ga Rii, Niii Da Pa* - the accent is on 'Ma' and *Ni*. And 'Ga' and 'Da' have just to be touched but not dwelt on. The 'Ma' is elongated and 'Ni' can have its full share of gamaka. Contrasting it with *Kedaragowla*, he played 'Saraguna' in full, omitting the beautiful *chitta swara* for reasons unknown.

Analysing *Sahana* and *Dwijavanti*, both janyas of the 28th *Mela Harikambhoji*, he played *Sahana* in detail, following it up with the *Kirti 'Giripai'* in full. He generously said that the audience should be able to distinguish the characteristic features which give *Dwijavanthi* its *swaroopa* when he played it and proceeded to do so elaborately. *Dikshitar's 'Akhilandeshwari'* was soothing and refreshing.

Contrasting it with *Nadanamakriya*, the learned scholar sang 'Merusamana' in *Mayamalavagowla* after which the percussion artistes gave expression to their feelings in a resounding *Tani Avartanam*. The *Mridangam* 'spoke' in *Cheluvaj's* hands and one was reminded of *Ghatam Manjunath* of yore, in *Venkataram's* playing, which sounded bell-like.

RRK concluded his *Raga-darshini* with the *devaranam* 'agododdharana'.

Ranga Pravesha : Another View

Your Editorial "In Defence of Ranga Pravesha" (July 1998) takes a balanced view of the prevailing situation. I am not aware whether there is any sanction to Ranga Pravesha in our Lakshana Granthas. The "Gejje Pooje Ceremony" belongs to a totally different social ethos. As you have rightly observed, if Ranga Pravesha is to serve the purpose of testing the capabilities of the debutante (*inter-alia* of the guru also), the ritual has to become less expensive.

In this context, I have detailed below the practice that is being followed by Nandini Eashwar of "Raasa Vrunda" of our city:

- (i) Ranga Pravesha is arranged in a temple during morning Poojas: Sri Venkataramana swamy Temple in V.V. Mohalla or Iswara Temple in Chamaraja puram have adequate space for the stage and audience.
- (ii) Knowledgeable people and family members are among the invited.
- (iii) No special dress or ornaments is compulsory. Practice-dress is encouraged.
- (iv) Before the event, the Guru presents the following to the

debutante, after placing them before the deity and getting them sanctified : (a) A pair of ankle bells, the Guru herself lying these; (b) A pair of cymbals; (c) a shawl, which becomes a "raksha-kavacha" to the student; (d) a brass-lamp, symbol of spreading the light of knowledge and (e) a slab of red sugar-candy to carry sweet memories of the occasion.

- (v) The full marga of Bharathanatya is presented.
- (vi) No intermediate speeches or comments are allowed. However, after the performance, comments, adulations and blessings are welcomed.
- (vii) Expenses are restricted to the following items :
 - (a) Inexpensive invitation letters and phonecalls;
 - (b) an abhisheka to the deity;
 - (c) modest remuneration to the co-artists, with tambula, a shirt-piece or a pair of dhotis;
 - (d) if the student is bent upon presenting something to the guru, Nandini accepts an inexpen-

sive blouse piece or a cotton saree fit for daily use.

The temple authorities do not charge anything extra for holding the Ranga Pravesha. Only the dates should be suitable.

- (viii) In case, a student appears for Vidwat examination, that by itself is taken as Ranga Pravesha and even the above ritual is not insisted upon.

- (ix) In case, the student comes from a well-to-do family and the parents insist on a glittering event, it is held. But even here, the ritual in a temple is a must prior to the Ranga Pravesha in an auditorium. All speeches by Chief Guests, well-wishers, etc. as well as thanks-giving are held before the recital begins, so that the performance has a run-through.

The system being practised by Nandini Eashwar lends sanctity, solemnity and grace to the occasion, has no compulsion about it, is inexpensive and what is more, serves the purpose of a Ranga Pravesha.

It is worthy of commendation.

K. Raghavendra Rao
Mysore

Varied Fare in Kalakar Mandali's Jubilee

— Pramila Lochan



Pt. Yeshwant Bua Joshi (Vocalist) accompanied by Bhai Gaitonde on Tabla

Ever since its launch in 1973, Hindustani Kalakar Mandali has been consistently striving to popularise Hindustani classical music and bring to the forefront musicians from across India.

After "weathering its way through many a trial and tribulations", the Mandali, celebrated its Silver Jubilee year recently at Bangalore. Dedicated to the late Pt. Ramarao V. Naik, the three-day celebration was inaugurated on Dec. 28 by Sri M.P. Prakash (Hon'ble Minister for Rural

Development and Panchayat Raj) with Dr. S.L. Bhairappa,

eminent writer, as the Chief Guest.

The first session began with an educative and enthralling lecture-demonstration by three stalwarts; Pt. S.C.R. Bhatt (vocalist and disciple of Pt. S.N. Ratanjankar), Pt. Yeshwant Bua Joshi (doyen of Gwalior gayaki) and Pt. Suresh Bhai Gaitonde (tablist). The second session had a Hindustani vocal performance by two young, upcoming artistes; Dhananjay Hegde (disciple of Pt. Vinayak Torvi) and Hemang Mehta (disciple of Pt. Jasraj).

The third session felicitated three senior musicians; Pt. S.C.R. Bhatt,



Pt. Buddhadiya Mukherjee (Sitar) accompanied by Ravindra Yavagal (Tabla)



Pt. S.C.R. Bhatt

Pt. Yeshwant, Bua Joshi and Pt. Suresh Bhai Gaitonde. They were awarded the title 'Nadashree'. The fourth session presented a sitar recital by Pt. Budhaditya Mukherjee. The main artistes were well supported by Sri Ravindra Yavagal (tabla), Sri Udayraj Karpur (tabla) and Sri Vyasmurti Katti (harmonium).

The Kalakar Mandali was founded by a few well known senior musicians of Bangalore; the late Pt. Ramarao V. Naik, Pt. R.V. Seshadri Gavai, Pt. D.B. Harindra, M.V. Gopinath, the late Dr. Vasant Kawali, Acharya and K.S. Naik. These dedicated musicians have "led the organisation through many hardships and kept it alive", till the organising reins were handed over to the present Secretary P.S. Kulkarni who along with the President, C.G. Anantswamy

has plans to start a well equipped library of books, video and audio cassettes accessible to all their life members. Apart from this, the Mandali plans to hold lec-dems, felicitate artistes and encourage upcoming artistes.

According to Kulkarni, "Mandali has brought to Bangalore some special programmes like popularising harmonium solo programmes, having photographic exhibitions and conducting a State level music competition that we plan to have each year." On the eve of its Silver Jubilee celebration this year, a State level music competition was held on Nov. 28th and 29th, 1998. There were three categories: Hindustani vocal, instrumental and percussion for students of music in the age group 15-25 years.

The response was

encouraging with nearly 50 candidates registering. The winners were awarded with a certificate, memento and cash prize at a special function during the Silver Jubilee Celebration.

The competition, had an eminent panel of judges (D.B. Harindra, R.B. Sontakke, N.V. Gopinath, Aditi Upadhyaya and Betarbet Prabhakar Rao).

The winners were Dhananjay Hegde (disciple of Pt. Vinayak Torvi), Pratima Bellave (disciple of the late Pt. Ramarao V. Naik), Sateesh Bhat (disciple of Pt. Ganapati Bhatt) who first, second and third prize respectively in the vocal category.

The first and second prize for instrument were awarded respectively to Ashok Iyengar (disciple of Pt. Rajeev Taranath) and Guruprasad Hegde (disciple of Sri S.H. Sripad). And under the percussion category, the first and second prizes were awarded to Mahesh A.M. (disciple of Viswanath Nakod) and Gurumurthy Vaidya (disciple of Ravindra Yavagal) respectively.

With over 300 life members, the Mandali's impressive and gradual achievement in popularising music is heartening. And one hopes that they would celebrate its Golden Jubilee in their own auditorium, a dream and goal they wish to accomplish. □

LETTERS

'Ganakala Bhushana'

Sir,

Reference letter under title 'Ganakala Bhushana' *Phoenix*, Sept. – Oct. '98.

I admit that the title is conferred by Karnataka Ganakala Parishat in its annual Musicians' Conference for artiste who preside over it. I also know that Sangeetha Kalanidhi is conferred by the Madras Music Academy. I am aware that 'Ganakalasindhu' is conferred on D. Subbaramaiah and others in the State Music Conference at Mysore.

I came to know about this only after I received the certificate with the title. Similarly, some other artistes have received certificates each with a title.

I brought this matter to the organiser of the function each year. But he challenged and asked me to use the title giving the example that he had been using the title 'Ganavisharada' in the annual "Guru Shantha Gavai's" aradhana. In reply to suggestions that I refrain from using it. I declare and challenge that celebrities living around villages in Shimoga District and elsewhere are in no way less brilliant in stature than those singled out titles in cities like Madras, Bangalore, Mysore, Mumbai and for even in Delhi.

I have devoted my entire life to bring to light the profiles of such great persons still alive today.

Once again I repeat, I never use the title "Ganakala Bhashaa" for self-glorification.

Bhadravathi

H. N. Rajanna

'Natya Loka'

Sir,

Reference your cover story on Muralidhara Rao (*Phoenix*, Oct-Sep'98).

Fortunately, Muralidhar was able to complete the work and providentially, G.T. Narayana Rao through his son's Publishing House got it published. I have regard for Narayana Rao ever since I came to know from "Vignana Prapancha" of Dr. Shivarama Karanth that the latter held him in great esteem. Your journal has enabled me to know that Mr. Rao has a promising son who owns a Publishing House, which has published Muralidhar's *magnum o-pus* "Natya Loka". Narayana Rao's interview with him adds substance to the cover story.

I presume Mr. Rao had lived in Madikeri and knew my late lamented friend Amble Subba Rao. Himself a Natyacharya, Subba Rao in association with his son and daughter was running a dance school and his contribution to dance deserves mention.

Bhadravati

H. N. R.



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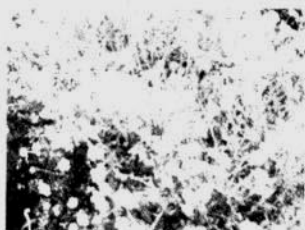
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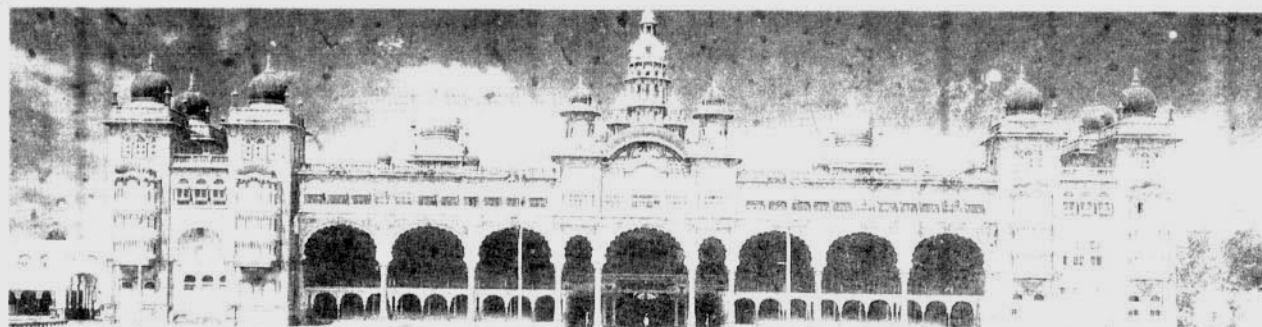
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For more details, contact
The Director



Karnataka Tourism

Government of Karnataka

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